Direct Link Service to Kutch Passengers

352. SHRIMATI URMILABEN CHIMANBHAI PATEL: Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether there have been representations for providing direct link service to Kutch passengers with Mumbai-Ahmedabad-Sharjah and Delhi-Ahmedabad-Muscat sector flights for a long time;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) the action taken or proposed to be taken by government in this regard; and

(d) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI C.M. IBRAHIM): (a) to (d) The air service requirements of Kutch passengers are essentially catered through Ahmedabad Airport. Ahmedabad is connected to Dubai via Mumbai/Delhi thrice a week and to Muscat via Mumbai twice a week by Air India services.

Construction of air-strip in Sikkim

353. DR. MOHAN BABU:
DR. Y. LAKSHMI PRASAD:
SHRIMATI JAYAPRADA NAHATA:

Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to construct an air-strip in Sikkim;

(b) if so, the details thereof including the cost of site; and

(c) when the air-strip would be operational to boost tourism?

THE MINISTER OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI C.M. IBRAHIM): (a) to (c) No, Sir. Due to the hilly terrain, a suitable site for constructing an airport at a reasonable cost has not been identified so far.

Seizure of Gold Biscuits and Foreign Currency

354. SHRI RAMDAS AGARWAL: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that gold worth Rs. 1.10 crore in the form of biscuits was seized in July and gold worth over 31.5 Kgs. recovered in August, 1996 from four passengers who arrived in India from Kazakhstan apart from reported seizure of "foreign currency worth Rs. 2.70 crore" as per newsitem published in the Hindustan Times dated 3rd November, 1996;

(b) if so, the details thereof and reasons for increase in such cases recently; and

(c) what preventive measures Government have taken in this regard including action against culprits and officials involved?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM): (a) Yes Sir.

(b) The details of the three cases are given below:—

(i) 184 gold biscuits worth Rs. 1.10 crores were seized from Lufthansa Airlines flight LH.760 which arrived from Frankfurt at IGI Airport, Delhi on 9.7.96. The gold biscuits were concealed in the food trollies of the aircraft. Two passengers and four catering staff were arrested for their involvement in the case.

(ii) 31.5 Kgs. of gold biscuits, totally valued at Rs. 1.62 crores were seized on 26.8.96 from four passengers who had arrived by Kazakshtan Airlines Charter flight No. KZA-1911 at IGI Airport. All the four passengers alongwith the person who was to receive smuggled gold were arrested.